

Australian Capital Territory

Territory Records Standard for Records Management Number 3: Records Description and Control 2003*

Notifiable instrument NI2003—229

made under the

Territory Records Act 2002, s 18

I approve the Standard for Records Management Number 3: Records Description and Control.

David Wardle
Director of Territory Records
1 July 2003

*Name amended under Legislation Act 2001 s 60



Standard for Records Management Number 3 - Records Description and Control

PURPOSE

To set principles and minimum standards for the description and control of Territory agencies records.

AUTHORITY

This Standard is produced in accordance with section 18 of the Act, which allows the Director of Territory Records to approve Standards or Codes for agency records management.

Under section 17 of the Act an agency's Principal Officer may only approve a Records Management Program that complies with the Standards and Codes set by the Director of Territory Records.

Section 17(2) allows a Principal Officer to approve a Records Management Program that does not comply with an approved Standard or Code only if the Director of Territory Records agrees in writing that noncompliance is necessary for the operational needs of the agency.

Section 14 of the Act requires agencies to "make and keep full and accurate records" of their activities. Section 15 requires agencies to take steps necessary to ensure that the information in their records continues to be accessible.

This Standard must be reviewed as soon as practicable 5 years after its commencement.

INTRODUCTION

Records need to be described in order to make them accessible to current and future users, and to help in guaranteeing their reliability and authenticity over time. Description of records also helps users to understand the context in which they were made and how they have been used. Proper description and control of records is required to ensure that they are a full and accurate representation of agency business and that they remain accessible over time.

The Director of Territory Records endorses the Council of Federal, State and Territory Archives (COFSTA) Principles on Full and Accurate Records. The Australian Standard on Records Management, AS ISO 15489 has been adopted as the model for best practice recordkeeping. The proper description and control of records supports a number of the principles in the Australian Standard and the COFSTA statement.

May 2003

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BACKGROUND

COFSTA Principles on Full and Accurate Records

Records must be complete

In order to be understood, records need to have content, context and structure. Content is the substance of a document. Context refers to the information about the record, its making and use. The descriptive elements required by this Standard help to ensure that the context of every record is captured. Structure refers to how the elements of a record fit together. In paper systems structure is provided through mechanisms such as file covers, which make the relationship between documents within a file apparent. In electronic systems the structure of a record is less apparent, and care needs to be taken to ensure it is maintained, usually through the use of metadata. There are a number of recordkeeping metadata standards available which must be used to ensure that electronic systems capture complete records.

Records must be adequate

Records need to be adequate for the purposes for which they are kept. This can mean, for instance, that different levels of description might be required for records that are to be kept for long periods. Records that will be made available to the public may need more descriptive information so that they are comprehensible to people outside the agency that made them. Records being kept for a very short time may require less detailed descriptive information, as it is likely that the people making the records will be able to understand their immediate context.

Records must be accurate

Description and control mechanisms help to ensure that records are an accurate reflection of the business activity to which they relate. Records need to show what was communicated, decided or done. Close alignment of recordkeeping and business processes assists in accurate recordkeeping.

Records must be authentic

Authentic records are records that continue to show the business transactions that they purport to represent. They have not been tampered with or otherwise altered, except in ways that are authorised, detectable and recorded in the recordkeeping system. Records security measures can preserve records' authenticity, and descriptive information such as management and use histories can help to make apparent all uses of the record.

Records must be useable

Records must be identifiable, retrievable, accessible and available when needed. Good records description and control systems ensure that users, both internal and external, can find and retrieve the records that they need. Records control also helps

in making records available when needed by guarding against unauthorised destruction.

Records must be inviolate

Records must be securely maintained to prevent unauthorised access, destruction, alteration or removal. Good descriptive and control systems work to prevent unauthorised actions, both through security systems and by making any use of the records detectable.

PRINCIPLE 1: DESCRIPTION AND CONTROL

Records need to be described so that they can be retrieved when needed. This description process must happen when the record is made. Agencies will usually describe their records with the needs of their own staff in mind. However, consideration must be given to the needs of external users when describing records that will be kept for more than 20 years and will therefore be available to the public under the *Territory Records Act 2002*.

Descriptive information about records also helps in controlling and managing them. By describing records using terms that reflect the functions and activities of the agency, other records management tasks, such as applying Records Disposal Schedules, can be simplified. Descriptive information about who made, accessed or carried out tasks on records helps to ensure their reliability and authenticity. Assigning unique control symbols to records makes it easier for agencies to identify missing or fraudulently made records. This information about who made and used records and when is also important evidence of the actions of government officials, and is vital for short and long-term accountability to regulators and the public at large.

Compliance with Principle 1

A compliant agency can demonstrate that:

- they take account of the principles described in this Standard when describing records, and particularly consider the needs of external users;
- registration and management information about every record is made and kept, even after the records to which this information relates, have been destroyed; and
- records are kept appropriately— regardless of format – in a manner that protects them from alteration or unauthorised destruction and ensures their useability and accessibility over time.

PRINCIPLE 2: DESCRIPTIVE ELEMENTS

There are six descriptive elements that must be recorded for all of an agency's records in order to comply with this Standard. The following elements are the minimum required to be made for each record in order to describe its context and to comply with this Standard. Agencies should note, however, that in order for electronic recordkeeping systems to operate effectively more elaborate descriptive schemes would almost certainly be required. Agencies must consult a more comprehensive recordkeeping metadata standard when designing and implementing electronic recordkeeping systems.

Compliance with Principle 2

1. Date

The date the record was made is important:

- for access - so that people can find information about events according to when they happened;
- for evidential reasons - to understand when something described in the record happened;
- for contextual reasons - to understand how one record relates to other records, or the environment in which the record was made.

A compliant agency can demonstrate that:

- it captures the date of making of all of their records; and
- the date of receipt is recorded for records received by the agency from an external source, such as e-mails or other correspondence.

2. Creator

Knowing the creator of the record is important in understanding the record's content, purpose and reliability. The record creator's identity is also important in ascertaining whether or not they had the authority to make that record or to carry out the business they were engaged in.

A compliant agency can demonstrate that:

- they capture, for all of their records, the record's creator position in the agency and their name if the position name is not unique.

3. Title

All records must have a title in order to help people to find the records they want, to understand their contents, and to distinguish one record from another. Agencies must

use a thesaurus, which is a controlled language system, to title their records, and the thesaurus should be based on the functions and activities that the agency carries out.

The Director of Territory Records has provided the *Territory Version of Keyword AAA* as a thesaurus of terms relating to the administrative functions common to agencies. The use of this thesaurus is mandated for use by agencies for the titling of records of common administrative functions. Its use will also ensure a consistent approach to the titling of records of common administrative functions across the Territory.

For records that may be accessed by the public in the future, as well as for their own uses, agencies should consider adding additional subject keywords to their file titles or other descriptions of the records. Additional index or keyword terms might include the names of individuals, business or places referred to in the record.

A compliant agency can demonstrate that:

- all records are described with a meaningful title.

4. Identifier

All records must be given an identifier, number or control symbol that is unique within the agency's recordkeeping system. Numbering or control systems help to distinguish one record from another, and assist in guaranteeing the authenticity of records within the system. The identifier system used will depend on the needs of the agency and could take one of many forms, such as an annual single number system, where a new consecutive number sequence is begun each year, or an alphabetical system, where the file is identified by the name of a client.

A compliant agency can demonstrate that:

- each record they made is given a unique, non-repeatable control symbol.

5. Management History

All records management actions carried out on a record must be recorded. This includes the making of the record, its capture into the recordkeeping system, classification or titling, sentencing, disposal class and destruction. The date of each action must also be recorded, as well as the identity of the person or position carrying out the action. Management histories are important accountability tools and help to guarantee the authenticity of records by ensuring that any action carried out on them is recorded. In paper recordkeeping systems management histories are usually recorded in registers, on registration cards created for each record, or on the file cover. In electronic systems this information is often recorded in audit logs. Regardless of what system is used the management information about every agency record must be captured and retained permanently, even after the records to which the management history relates have been destroyed.

A compliant agency can demonstrate that:

- they create and maintain a management history or register for every record they make, and retain it even after the record to which it relates is destroyed.

6. Use History

The use history of a record is very similar to its management history. Use histories must record the date of use and the identity of the user. It must record use that is made of the record. In paper systems this information is often recorded in file movement cards or on file covers. In electronic systems it is often recorded in audit logs. Regardless of what system is in place, when a record is used by an agency a use history record must be captured. This use history must be retained for the life of the record to which it relates.

A compliant agency can demonstrate that:

- they create a use history for every record they make, and maintain that history for as long as the record to which it relates is kept.

Other Control Measures

Records, and the descriptive information about them, must be maintained in an appropriate and secure environment so that they cannot be altered or destroyed without proper approval. Regardless of whether the agency is using a paper or electronic recordkeeping system, adequate security measures must be in place to ensure only authorised persons have access to records and those records are protected from deliberate or accidental loss, damage or alteration. The security of the records must be addressed in both their physical management and in the procedures the agency puts in place for their making, maintenance and use.

Recordkeeping systems, whether in paper or electronic format, must be distinguishable from other information sources. This is particularly important in small agencies where recordkeeping systems are likely to be kept in informal settings such as on networked computers.

DEFINITIONS

Agency

The Executive, an ACT Court, the Legislative Assembly Secretariat, an administrative unit, a Board of Inquiry, a Judicial or Royal Commission, any other prescribed authority, or an entity declared under the regulations of the *Territory Records Act 2002* to be an agency.

Appraisal

The process of evaluating business activities to:

- determine which records need to be captured;
- how long the records need to be kept to meet business needs; and
- meet the requirements of organisational accountability and community expectations.

Business Classification Schemes

A hierarchical scheme for identifying and defining the functions, activities and transactions an agency performs in the conduct of its business, and the relationships between them.

Metadata

Data describing content, context and structure of records and their management through time.

Principal Officer

The Chief Executive of an administrative unit, or its equivalent in other types of agencies.

Records

Information created, received, and maintained as evidence and information by an organisation or person, in pursuance of legal obligations or in the transaction of business. This recorded information must be maintained or managed by the agency to provide evidence of their business activities. Records can be in written, electronic or any other form.

Records of an Agency

Records, in writing, electronic or any other form, under the control of an agency or to which it is entitled to control, kept as a record of its activities, whether it was created or received by the agency.

Records Disposal Schedule

A document approved by the Director of Territory Records, which sets out the types of records an agency must make and how long they must be kept.

Records Management Program

A document which complies with section 16 of the *Territory Records Act 2002* by setting out the means by which an agency will manage its records, and is approved by the agency's Principal Officer.

Recordkeeping Systems

Information systems that capture, maintain and provide access to records over time. While the term is often associated with computer software, Recordkeeping Systems also encompass policies, procedures, practices and resources which are applied within an agency to ensure that full and accurate records of business activity are made and kept.

REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

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